

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter  
October 2019

Dear Folks,

Greetings to all of you there. Here is the October letter, maybe a little late. Sorry, as the early November days are very holy days in Bolivia and demand a lot of time. Thank all of you for your help to us here.

It is now the first day of November, All Saints Day, and I am just starting to write this letter. This past month has really been packed with events, but I will start with the election day of Bolivia on October 20. This has started a new round of violence that has disrupted all the lives of Bolivians, ours included. As always in the past as in the present the elections were never transparent, and always favor those in power when the elections take place. No exception this time around. The Association of American States has come to do an audit. I don't know the outcome yet, even though it should be easy to find all kinds of problems, even those that might not have been ordered from the top. The big problem is the effect all of this has on the daily lives of the poorer folks who must move to eat that night. It mainly consists of road blocks that prevent movement of goods, including food and other essentials from getting into the hands of those in need. We are part of that as we buy a lot from the city, flour, cooking oil, rice, some beans, among other things. We have managed so far to secure these things here through various means. Those who are blocking are of both sides, the government in power and those who are opposed to that government, in the cities by the opposition and in the rural areas by the campesinos who mostly favor the government in power. Today is Friday also and our kids should be going home for the weekend, the second weekend now. Most are able to go home as the blocking to the South is allowing the kids to pass through. To

the north they can go only so far. I have written a letter asking to let the truck go through. We will see if my letter is accepted. Of course, Sunday we must pick up the kids for another week. Many schools in the city have closed, and the lost days must be made up at the end of the school year (first days of December). We are praying a lot, even folks who normally do share that with me, tell me they are praying to Our God for help in all of this. The older folks remember years past, as do I. Hopefully the situation will not develop into even more violence as happened in some years past. I was here in the late 70's and early 80's. I know it firsthand. Of course, we are not alone with problems. Chile next door, Ecuador, and Venezuela are living hard times also. That does not help us any to know it. Only Argentina and Uruguay are having peaceful transitions.

Now some good news! Last year we built a good quality chemical laboratory, and after an examination of our place the Ministry of Education promised us equipment and materials. We waited. Finally, in the second week of October the material came. We are proud, and we have a very good chemistry teacher at present who knows how to use so much of it. I have invited other schools to visit us, maybe even use our place for an experiment or two, to entice them to push this for their school. This bodes well for the future, as I would like us to have the capacity of doing test on our foods that we produce and maybe even canned foods for exporting. No one buys canned food in Bolivia, at least to my experience. Argentina and Chile do a lot of canning but mostly this is sold in other countries, including in the U. S. Also, I want the kids (boys and girls) in the agricultural studies to have the capacity of testing their water for purity and soil for its nutrients and see what is lacking or contaminated. This will help a lot in their production. We are really proud, as you might note from this letter.

We had an exposition of our school work in early October, a Thursday and Friday (10-11 Oct.). I felt it was in some respects less

than last year. But some things were a real plus, including a high-quality folk dancing exposition. I must admit that this year's dancing was the best I have ever seen at our school since we began 15 years ago. The younger kids just starting were always a little poor, but not this year. One of the older groups did a type of drama in their dance that portrayed the life of miners (very great part of Bolivian history) and the death by an explosion in the mine. For me it was a new twist and very touching in beauty and tragic at the same time. Each class, 14 presentations, provided dances Thursday night, then the 5 best of all were presented again on Friday AM. To help in the presentations we offered money awards to the best three groups. This gave an incentive to work harder by the students. It really paid off. Our attendance at both events was very good, some 600 to 800 or more persons each day. The down side was the poor presentation of our technical courses. The ones who were to put it on, just did not have the time to do it as good as last year. Last year we had an excellent presentation of the many cultures (Indian groups in so many parts of the country). This was just a private school event last year. So, I had asked that the teachers show this type of exposition to all this year. This was very good again. I believe a lot in this as values of the past that maintained their lives for centuries help stabilize the character of today and will help carry these same values into the future. I want our kids to have this advantage in our every changing and loose society. Family values especially have deteriorated, and we really need to try to recuperate some on that.

(Now, Monday, 4 Oct. I had two full days of religious activity with Masses and religious celebrations both Saturday and Sunday) Just a note for all of you on what has been accomplished up to this point with all our efforts in educating those who would not be able to study if we were not functioning. We have graduated some 1050 students with high school diplomas up to last year, and this year will come close if not pass 1150 diplomas into hands of those who

have finished with us. This includes our regular high school students and the adult high school together. And I don't know how many titles of a profession we have given to those who have finished our technical courses. At present we have 988 students adding up all numbers in all our programs. But all of this has impacted our area and will continue to move forward those who have been able to take advantage of what we offer. How many lives have been affected! Here I am not only thinking of the material benefit, but attitudes that have deepened in those areas that matter most in our daily lives. Ultimately this is what really counts. MAY OUR GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS OUR EFFORTS! When I say "OUR" here in this letter, **I mean and especially include all of you there who have made it all possible and continue to make it possible.** MAY OUR MERCIFUL GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU THERE WITH SO MUCH HAPPINESS AND GUARANTEE YOUR ENTRANCE INTO THE LIFE THAT REALLY COUNTS THAT ONLY BEGINS WITH OUR PASSING FROM HERE INTO ETERNITY AND A FULL LIFE WITH OUR GOD, FATHER-SON-HOLY SPIRIT, THIS GREAT SERVING COMMUNITY OF LOVE AND WELL-BEING! Hey, it's real living there!

When we began our school in 2004, we also began a graduating class retreat on married life and how to help towards a happiness in that life. We always used retreat centers in the city that were built for such events. But the cost of rentals of the buildings and the cost of travel rose steadily that after some 4 or 5 years made it impossible for us to continue. But with our new retreat center near the river in Abapó to the southwest of Cabezas we will begin again this year (the social and political problems having been solved, May Our God so grant us!). We have completely enclosed the center with higher walls yet with open space for air/wind to take out the heat), the space covered with steel bars, and built a small kitchen for cooking food. All of the floor now is covered with cement, and when all these political problems are solved, we have hope of a ceramic floor for the central nave at a price that is almost a donation by a

large ceramic factory in Santa Cruz that gives floors at low prices to churches (slightly damaged tile which damage no one can notice). We at the beginning had built bathrooms with showers for both boys and for girls. We just will now put up a moveable partition for nighttime sleeping with straw mattresses thrown on the floor for both. So, we have already started to plan the retreat of two full days, ending Saturday night with the regular Saturday night community Mass at 7 pm. It is the great number of broken and dysfunctional families that convinces us of this great need. Please pray that all is settled here soon, as we are thinking not only of the graduating seniors, but also of lower-class retreats on getting to know each other on a deeper plane to form a relationship that will last "until death"! And beyond that, we are also planning a retreat for our parents, some of whom have expressed interest in such an event. This will not be limited only to our school but be open to other schools and small-town folks. So, if there are enough other students who so wish, we will also present another program for them. We not only want to be an educating program for the material world but help prepare for entering the REAL WORLD THAT NEVER ENDS, besides living happily in this life.

With all our political problems around us, and me being the most known religious person in this area, I have been asked by both sides (some 4 talks or biblical reflections and prayer so far, two for each side) to give talks on respect and harmonious living based on our Faith. Of course, the sides include both Catholic and Evangelicals. I have no way of knowing how many have been touched by what I have said, but it was interesting to have been invited. This is the first such time that this has happened in our area. Not even in the city have bishops or priests been invited for this kind of thing. I have been treated with much respect and each side clapped at the end, but the divisions continue nevertheless. With this letter I have thought it might be good to present to you all there what basically I have said here, as I take the family as the

model for community living. Using Genesis 1,27-28a and Galatians 5,13-15, which was read each time as a base for what I was to apply afterwards. First, for the family. It is noticeable that Our God created our humanity in God's own image, male and female He created them, and He blessed them. The image of Our Lord is seen equally in the two, not one over the other despite our history all over the world that has had a male domination. In their union God blessed them, together they are blessed with procreation. This can in no way be construed as male domination. Each must be heard, have part in the decision of whatever is to be done or said. For me that is the only way to understand what Our God tells us. We as Catholics believe this is divinely inspired, not open then to discussion or building a contrary opinion. Equality and harmony of life is what Our God has divinely given to us. If one person wants to dominate or make decisions alone, this is egotistical and the results are "biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another" (Galatas 5, 3-15). We are free to love and give of ourselves for others, never using our freedom for personal gain over others. This is for family living. But this also applies to our community living, the big family of humanity. We are all created in God's image, so then equal before Our Lord and equal with one another, no amount of freedom allows us to lord it over others, always treating with respect and even awe as we recognize God's image in the other, whose person is destined as we ourselves to live eternally with Our God. Not treating the other with respect, even a little domination by ourselves is putting in danger our future with God. One group of opinion or political persuasion has by Faith the necessity of listening, valuing others who think differently, without necessarily agreeing at the same time. Ultimately the majority (real majority, not fabricated by fraud) must be won out in an election. Here fraud is the real enemy to respect and so to harmonious living that Our God so wants for us here on earth and then moving us on into Heaven.

Again, I THANK ALL OF YOU WHO MAKE POSSIBLE OUR WORK  
HERE. MAY OUR GOD MOVE ALL OF YOU TO CONTINUE, SO  
THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE A LITTLE MORE HUMANLY and we  
who have, will be preparing ourselves for the LIFE BEYOND HERE  
THAT NEVER ENDS, ONLY SUPREME HAPPINESS.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,  
Fr. Bob Thames